

Message Text

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ACTION SY-05

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DODE-00 MCT-01 /036 W

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R 020844Z SEP 76

FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

TO AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

INFO SECSTATE WASHDC 1665

AMCONSUL KARACHI

AMEMBASSY ATHENS

C O N F I D E N T I A L BEIRUT 7230

DEPT FOR A/SY/EX, A/SY/FO; KARACHI FOR RSS; ATHENS FOR RTC

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: ASEC, SY, LE

SUBJECT: BEIRUT-MASNAA-BEIRUT CONVOY, AUGUST 31, 1976

1. TRANSFER PARTY CONSISTING OF CHARGE HUNT, ADMIN OFFICER WALSH AND CRO DAVIS DEPARTED CHANCERY AT 0620, AUGUST 31, 1976. TRANSFER PARTY WAS ACCOMPANIED BY RSO AND TWO BEIRUT EMBASSY BODYGUARDS. THE CONVOY WAS COMPOSED OF LEAD CAR, PRINCIPAL'S CAR AND FOLLOW CAR. IN ADDITION, PLO PROVIDED ONE ESCORT VEHICLE, A RED PICK-UP TRUCK MANNED BY FIVE FATAH SOLDIERS. CONVOY PROCEEDED FROM BEIRUT TO MASNAA VIA ARAMOUN-AALEY-BHAMDOUN-SOFAR.

2. IN LEFTIST-CONTROLLED LEBANON CONVOY ENCOUNTERED ONLY THREE ACTIVE ROADBLOCK/CHECKPOINTS. ALL THREE WERE MANNED BY JUNBLATTIS. RSO'S DRIVER, WHO RECENTLY TRAVELED THE SAME ROUTE TO DAMASCUS, COMMENTED ON THE REDUCED NUMBER OF ROADBLOCKS AND THE TOTAL ABSENCE OF ANY ROADBLOCKS COLLECTING TOLLS. THROUGH THE INTERCESSION OF OUR PLO ESCORT, CONVOY WAS NOT REQUIRED TO STOP AT ANY OF THESE CHECKPOINTS. AT THE LAST JUNBLATT CHECKPOINT BETWEEN BHANDOUN AND SOFAR, PLO ESCORT AND BEIRUT FOLLOW CAR DROPPED OFF TO AWAIT THE
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INCOMING DAMASCUS PARTY. RSO AND TRANSFER PARTY

PROCEEDED WITHOUT ESCORT TO FIRST SYRIAN CHECKPOINT OUTSIDE OF SOFAR. ALTHOUGH WE WERE REQUIRED TO STOP AT ALL SYRIAN MANNED CHECKPOINTS, ONCE IDENTIFIED AS AMERICAN EMBASSY OFFICIALS WE WERE ALLOWED TO PROCEED WITHOUT FURTHER INSPECTION. TRIP THROUGH THE BEKAA WAS UNEVENTFUL AND NO UNUSUAL SYRIAN MILITARY ACTIVITY WAS NOTED. ALL PERSONNEL AND EQUIPMENT APPEARED TO BE DUG IN AND STATIC.

3. INCOMING PARTY CONSISTING OF ADMIN OFFICER BAQUET, MRS. WATERMAN, MRS. O'BRIEN, CRO HALLMAN AND MSG PARKER WAS MET AT THE MASNAA LEBANESE BORDER CHECKPOINT. ALTHOUGH THERE WAS A GREAT DEAL OF ACTIVITY IN THE AREA, IT DID NOT APPEAR TO BE FUNCTIONING AS A CHECKPOINT.

4. AFTER COMPLETION OF PERSONNEL, BAGGAGE AND POUCH TRANSFERS, INCOMING PARTY DEPARTED MASNAA WITH RSO. RETURN CONVOY CONSISTED OF BEIRUT LEAD CAR AND TWO ARMORED CARS CONTAINING INCOMING PERSONNEL. RETURN TRIP THROUGH SYRIAN LINES WAS UNEVENTFUL AND CONVOY WAS ALLOWED TO PROCEED THROUGH SYRIAN CHECKPOINTS WITH ONLY A CURSORY EXAMINATION. PLO ESCORT AND EMBASSY FOLLOW CAR WERE REJOINED AT JUNBLATT CHECKPOINT OUTSIDE BHANDOUN AND CONVOY PASSED UNEVENTFULLY THROUGH LEFTIST-CONTROLLED CHECKPOINTS WITHOUT STOPPING UNTIL ARRIVAL IN BEIRUT.

5. ROAD CONDITIONS BETWEEN ARAMOUN AND SOFAR WERE FROM BAD TO NON-EXISTENT, AND BOTH INCOMING AND OUTGOING CONVOYS EXPERIENCED DIFFICULTIES. ON OUTGOING CONVOY, PRINCIPAL'S VEHICLE SUFFERED FROM MECHANICAL PROBLEMS WHICH WERE EXAGGERATED BY THE POOR ROAD CONDITIONS THUS CAUSING FREQUENT DELAYS. INBOUND CONVOY'S TWO NEW ARMORED CARS WERE FORCED TO PROCEED WITH EXTREME CAUTION, RESULTING IN A SPEED OF FIVE-TWENTY MPH BETWEEN SOFAR AND ARAMOUN. ALTHOUGH IT WAS RSO'S INTENTION OO UTILIZE THESE TWO VEHICLES TO TRANSPORT PERSONNEL BETWEEN BEIRUT AND DAMASCUS, THE EXPERIENCE OF THIS CONVOY PROVES THIS TO BE IMPRACTICAL.

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EXTREME BRITTLINESS OF THESE TWO CARS PREVENTS ADEQUATE SPEED OVER THE POOR ROADS. AN ARMORED LANDROVER WOULD SEEM TO BE THE ONLY APPROPRIATE VEHICLE FOR THIS SECTION OF ROAD. RSO INTENDS UTILIZE OTHER VEHICLES IN PLACE OF ARMORED CARS BETWEEN BEIRUT AND DAMASCUS. IN INTERIM, THE TWO ARMORED CARS WILL BE RETAINED BY POST FOR USE IN BEIRUT.

6. NO FIRING OR SHELLING WAS HEARD OR OBSERVED DURING TRIPS TO AND FROM MASNAA. THIS ROUTE, ASIDE FROM THE EXTREMELY POOR ROAD CONDITIONS ENCOUNTERED, APPEARS TO BE REASONABLY SECURE PROVIDED AN ESCORT IS USED BETWEEN BEIRUT AND BHAMDOUN.
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